



spiny softshell

Apalone spinifera

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Testudines
Family:	Trionychidae

Features

The female spiny softshell grows to 18 inches long, while the male rarely exceeds seven inches. This turtle's shell is soft, smooth, and leathery with no scales or scutes (plates). It gives the animal a pancake-like appearance. The plastron (lower shell) is white. The spiny softshell has circular markings on the carapace (upper shell), but these may be obscured in older females. Like the smooth softshell, the spiny softshell has a pointed nose. Short spines are located on the carapace above the neck.

Natural History

The spiny softshell lives in rivers, but also inhabits large lakes and impoundments. It tends to avoid aquatic areas with rocky bottoms or much emergent vegetation. It eats crustaceans, fish, amphibians, insects, mollusks (snails, slugs, and others), and dead animals. It searches for food in the early morning and late evening. It is a powerful swimmer and also moves well on land. It buries itself in sand

with only the head sticking out far enough to reach above the water's surface for breathing. It will bury itself in mud to overwinter. The mating season lasts from April through May. The female deposits between four and 32 eggs in a sandbank near the water during early summer. The number of eggs produced depends on the female's size (the larger her size, the greater the number of eggs). Eggs hatch in late August or early September.

Habitats

interior rivers and streams; Mississippi River; Missouri River; natural lakes and prairies marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs

Iowa Status

common, native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.